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IMAGINING EARLY MODERN LONDON

*Perceptions and Portrayals of the City from Stow to Strype,
1598–1720*

EDITED BY
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CHAPTER 4

City, capital, and metropolis: the changing shape of seventeenth-century London

Vanessa Harding

Stow's original *Survey* and Strype's edition of it mark two date-points on the trajectory of early modern London's growth: neither the beginning nor the end, but sufficiently far apart for complex and dramatic changes to be visible in the city they describe. London's population had more than doubled; the built-up area had spread widely; the fabric and texture of the built environment had changed. If the city is a text, there is an appropriate analogy in the contrast between Stow's compact, structured account – though itself an historical palimpsest – and Strype's more prolix, discursive work, infilled, interpolated, and asymmetric, reflecting the changed shape and appearance of the cities they describe. In the historiography of early modern London as a built and lived environment, there is an important interplay between verbal description, cartographic mapping, and visual representation, as of course there is in Strype's *Survey* itself. It is this interplay that this chapter will illustrate, considering not only the physical changes to London, but also the way in which material changes affected perceptions and experiences of the capital as a space inhabited and used.

I CHANGING SHAPE

The physical changes to the spread and outline of London were obvious and dramatic. Seventeenth-century London's population more than doubled, from around 200,000 to something over 500,000; the area covered by building increased by a still greater amount.¹ London was not neatly mapped by contemporaries in 1600 and 1700: the major map exemplars for early modern London date

¹ V. Harding, 'The population of London, 1550–1700: a review of the published evidence', *London Journal* 15 (1990), 111–28.

from the 1550s and the 1670s and 1680s. For the mid-sixteenth century, a large-scale map-view engraved on copper plates, of which three plates are now known, appears to have been the ancestor of both a large-scale woodcut version and of the reduced version published in Braun and Hogenberg's *Civitates Orbis Terrarum* in 1572.² The latter (fig. 1), though compressed and simplified from the original, provides the best single-plate overview of London shortly before 1561 (the date of the destruction of St Paul's steeple). It shows 'London' still largely consisting of the walled city and a narrow ring of suburbs, drawn out towards the west by the separate vill of Westminster; to the south of the river, Southwark consisted of a nucleus of settlement around the bridge head and some ribbon development along the roads leading into Surrey and Kent. The capital was compact, definable, separate from its surrounding agrarian hinterland. While this separation of city and country may well have been exaggerated for visual and rhetorical effect, it is still the case that London was limited in extent and easily apprehended as an entity.

Several new maps of London were surveyed and published in the later seventeenth century, and more or less skilful and truthful derivatives proliferated. By 1680 (fig. 2), 'London' had stretched east and west into a continuous and shapeless metropolis. The city, Westminster, and Southwark had merged into a single built-up area: streets and houses stretched from Piccadilly almost to Limehouse, incorporating south Bloomsbury and Holborn to the west of the city and much of Stepney and riverside Wapping to the east; extensive suburbs in central and east Southwark had begun to mirror the suburban spread on the north bank. Almost all trace of the walls and differentiated settlements that had characterized the mid-sixteenth century capital had disappeared from the cartographic overview. The street-plan of the new metropolis had taken on a form of its own, incorporating but hardly determined by the few ancient suburban streets and roads visible in the 1550s.³

We do not know how widely available the contemporary cartographic evidence for the spread of London was, since there are few

² All three versions are reproduced in A. Prockter and R. Taylor (eds.), *The A to Z of Elizabethan London* (1979). The third copper plate was discovered more recently and exhibited at the Museum of London in 1998.

³ Cf. R. Hyde, J. Fisher, and R. Cline (eds.), *The A to Z of Restoration London (the City of London, 1676)* (1992).

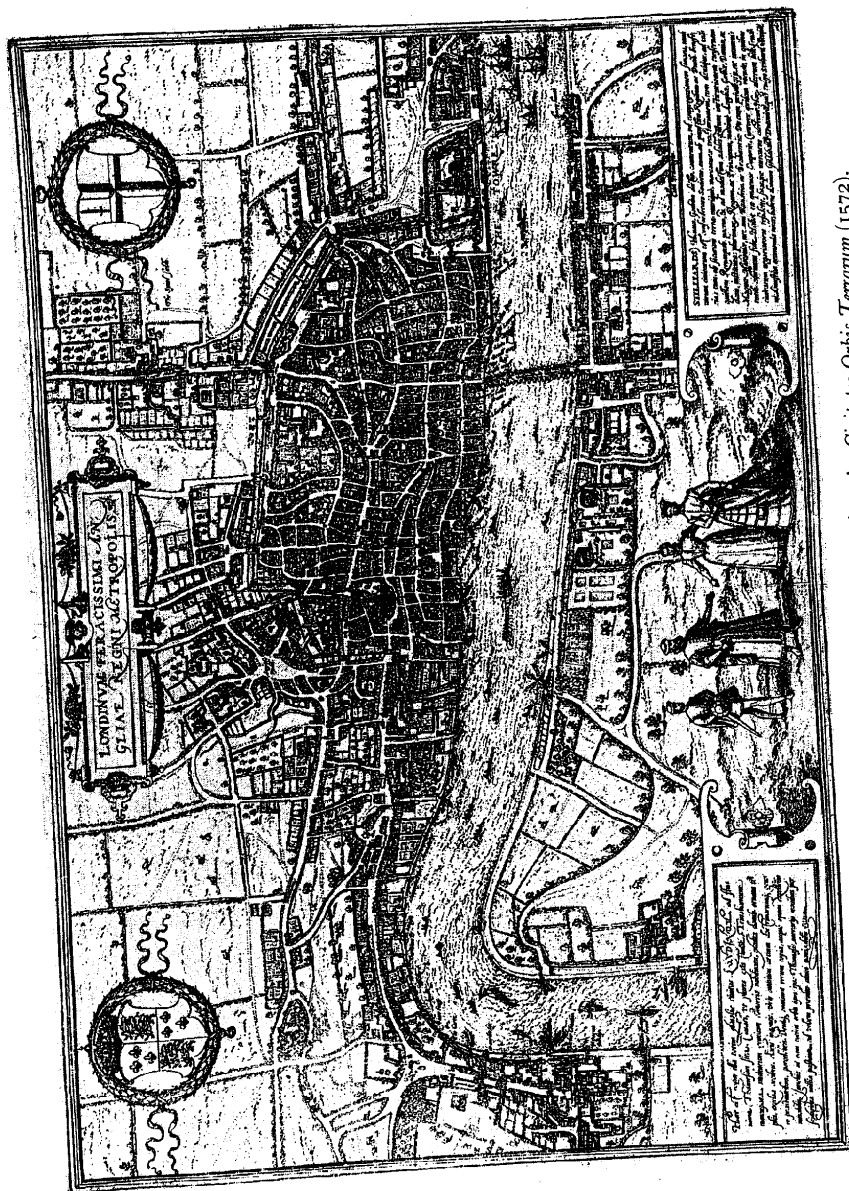


Fig. 1 London in c. 1560, from Braun and Hogenberg's *Civitates Orbis Terrarum* (1572).

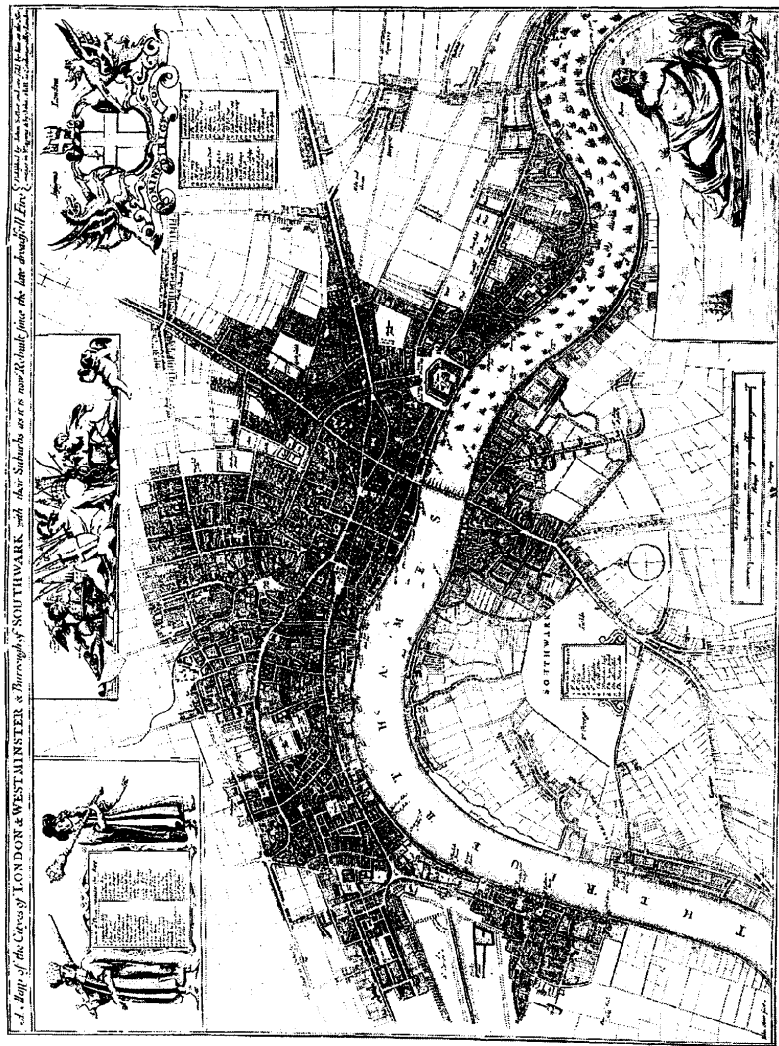


Fig. 2 London c. 1680: John Oliver's 'A Mapp of the Cities of London and Westminster and Burrough of Southwark with their Suburbs as it is now Rebuilt since the late dreadful Fire'.

surviving versions of any of the early maps. Though it has been suggested that Stow had a print of the Copperplate map when he was writing the *Survey*,⁴ this is not wholly convincing; the way in which he described the city seems essentially linear and perambulatory, respecting invisible boundaries and definitions, rather than exploiting a diagrammatic representation. Although his topographical structure reflects the ideology of the map-view (city first and most prominent, satellites and suburbs a long way behind in importance), his account is essentially a tour of the city, proceeding by a series of landmarks and visual cues. 'The next is Brodestreet warde, which beginneth within Bishopsgate, from the water conduit westward on both the sides of the street . . . Next unto *Pawlet* House is the parish church . . . Then next haue ye the *Augustin* Friers church . . . Some small distance from thence.'⁵ Nor can we tell how clearly any seventeenth-century Londoners might have had a panoptic, bird's-eye view, image of their city in mind. Some visual images may have gained a wider currency, such as the long views of London from the Thames, but for evidence of awareness of London's changing shape we need to turn to literary and documentary sources, and to what becomes a prominent rhetorical topos.

Stow himself begins the sequence by calling attention to the extent of change and spread that had already taken place by the 1590s. He comments on numerous occasions on the recent sprawl of the metropolis over green fields and pleasant suburbs: he noted how Hog Lane outside Bishopsgate had 'within these fortie years' been a road hedged with elm trees between pleasant fields with a wholesome air; 'nowe within a few years [it was] made a continuall building throughout, of Garden houses, and small Cottages'. Aldgate High Street, once characterized by a few scattered tenements with many gaps between them, was now 'fully replenished with buildings outward, & also pestered with diuerse Allyes', to Whitechapel and beyond.⁶ Similarly, from St Katherine's to Wapping 'was neuer a house standing within these 40 yeares' but since then it had become 'a continuall streete, or filthy straight

⁴ M. Holmes, 'A source-book for Stow?', in A. E. J. Hollaender and W. Kellaway (eds.), *Studies in London History presented to P. E. Jones* (1969), pp. 257-85.

⁵ Stow, *Survey*, 1.175-81. Cf. M. de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, 1988), pp. 115-30, on the contrast between 'tours' and 'maps' as a way of describing the city.

⁶ Stow, *Survey of London*, 1.127.

passage . . . almost to *Radcliff*, a good mile from the Tower'.⁷ Munday's editions (1618 and 1633) add some material to Stow's structure, when describing the spread of London. For example, in talking of the east end, he gives an account of the usurers or moneylenders who now inhabit Houndsditch, a description of Wapping chapel, built in 1617, and an account, with documents, of the neighbourhood's struggle against an alum works that had been established there in 1627.⁸ The real contrast, however, is with Strype. Stow's text is embedded in Strype's, and the latter was certainly a more prolix writer, especially on forms of government, and he imported a huge amount of documentation; nevertheless the difference in treatment of certain areas of the capital is very marked, and the work as a whole is at least six times as long. Stow had noted in a few lines, for example, that in his lifetime the street from St Katherine's to Wapping had been lined with buildings, but his implication is that it was no more than that; Strype needed six pages to describe an area now 'exceeding thick with Buildings, . . . very populous [and] . . . much improved by human Industry'.⁹ Stow mentions building towards Ratcliff and Shadwell, while Strype discusses the whole of Stepney and its hamlets including Mile End New Town 'built with many good Houses'; Spitalfields, 'Now all built into Streets'; Shoreditch, 'all along a continual building of small and base Tenements, for the most part lately erected'.¹⁰

There were other forms and genres of literary comment on London's physical extension, a number of which are usefully collected in Lawrence Manley's anthology *London in the Age of Shakespeare*. For the western spread, John Speed in 1611 wrote that

this London, as it were disdain[ing] bondage, hath set herself on each side far without the walls, and left her west gate (Ludgate) in the midst, from whence with continual buildings she hath continued her street to the king's palace, and joined a second city to herself . . . no walls are set about this city, and those of London are left to show rather what it was than what it is.¹¹

⁷ *Ibid.*, II.70-1.

⁸ [Anthony Munday, H. Dyson, and others], *The Survey of London . . . begun first by the Paines and Industry of John Stow, in the yeere 1598 . . . And now completely finished by the study and labour of A.M., H.D. and others, this present yeere 1633* (1633), pp. 460-8.

⁹ Strype, *Survey*, II.iv.37-43, esp. p. 39.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, II.iv.47, 49-50.

¹¹ John Speed (1611) in *The Theatre of the Empire of Great Britaine* (1676), excerpted in Lawrence Manley (ed.), *London in the Age of Shakespeare: An Anthology* (1986), pp. 42-3.

Thomas Freeman in 1614 wrote of London's 'progress' to Islington, and that 'Saint Katherine she takes Wapping by the hand, and Hogsdon will to Highgate ere't be long'.¹² A century later, Strype's contemporary Defoe, speaking of London 'in the Modern Acceptation', pointed out that the old walls and city were an irrelevance, and that London now included 'all that vast Mass of Buildings, reaching from *Black-Wall* in the *East* to *Tot-Hill Fields* in the *West*; . . . and all the new Buildings by, and beyond, *Hannover Square*'. He estimated the circumference of the built-up area at over thirty-six miles.¹³ There is also an important shift in emphasis in the account of the metropolis and its size, from a response that is fearful and resistant to change, to one that celebrates size and success. John Graunt and William Petty, in the 1660s, 1670s, and 1680s, calculated London's size and population and compared it with Paris and Amsterdam; their concern was with wealth, manpower, and the outcome of competition on the European stage and in imperial enterprises.¹⁴ It is not unequivocal, this greater appreciation of the virtues of size and modernity, but it is an important development.

Both changes to the extent of London – the spread of buildings over formerly open land, and the accompanying intensification of population densities within the already-built-up area – began to change the shape of London in the sense of the street pattern and urban environment. The chronology and topography of change do not always match, in that sixteenth-century growth may have begun in the near suburbs, been followed by inner-city intensification, and then in the seventeenth century by outer-suburban sprawl. New building and rebuilding were sometimes concurrent, sometimes alternating, and different parts of London had their own particular developmental histories, affected by such factors as landlord enterprise, leasehold terms, and the presence or absence of a controlling local or national authority.

¹² Thomas Freeman, *Rubbe and a Great Cast* (1614), excerpted in Manley, *London in the Age of Shakespeare*, p. 250.

¹³ Daniel Defoe, *A Tour thro' the Whole Island of Great Britain* (1724–6; ed. G. D. H. Cole, 2 vols., 1927), I, pp. 316, 318–23.

¹⁴ John Graunt, 'Natural and political observations upon the Bills of Mortality' (1676); Sir William Petty, 'Two essays in political arithmetick concerning the people, housing, hospitals, etc. of London and Paris' (1687); Sir William Petty, 'Five essays in political arithmetick' (1686/7): all reprinted in C. H. Hull (ed.), *The Economic Writings of Sir William Petty, Together with Observations on the Bills of Mortality* (New York, 1963–4), II, pp. 314–435, 501–13, 519–44.

Although the most dramatic and visible aspect of London's early modern growth must have been the spread of building over green fields, the effect on the city centre was probably no less important. The population within the walls rose from perhaps 40,000 in 1550 to c. 70,000 in 1631, and could have reached 90,000–100,000 by 1664, so that densities rose from around 100 persons to the acre to an average of nearly 200. The highest densities, on the eve of the Fire of 1666, may have reached 230 persons to the acre in the centre of the city, to the south of Cheapside, and along the waterfront to the west of the Bridge.¹⁵ There was a bit of slack to take up in the mid-sixteenth century, a certain amount of space to play with, as a result of late medieval contraction and population loss, but by the early seventeenth century Cheapside was so densely built up with merchants' houses, shops, and warehouses that there were very few gardens and not every house had even a yard; some used the leads or flat roofs of adjacent properties or warehouses as their only outdoor space. The high property values of the city centre meant, however, that the quality of accommodation was fairly high: the demand was for substantial houses at high rents, not multiple dwellings at lower cost. The inhabitants of Cheapside were paying very much higher rents than were the inhabitants of the city fringes, but they were enjoying a more spacious way of life. Building upwards – houses rose to four, five, and six stories – gave them more rooms per family and fewer families shared houses.¹⁶

Further from the city centre, the cost of land was somewhat lower, and the potential rent value also low. High densities were achieved here not by building upwards but by crowding more people into fewer rooms, and by converting gardens and garden buildings such as sheds and stables to living accommodation. A property in Harrow Alley outside Aldgate was described in 1637 as 'a great coachhouse divided and inmated'; 'Thomas Sarter a pewterer at Algate built 6 double houses upon a garden platt last summer and in four of these

¹⁵ Harding, 'The population of London'. The intramural population was around 80,000 in the 1690s, and all the evidence suggests that it had fallen significantly as a result of the Fire and rebuilding, so it could have been as high as 100,000 on the eve of the plague. Approximate population densities for 1631 can be calculated by ward; for population densities by parish in 1695, see P. E. Jones and A. V. Judges, 'London population in the late seventeenth century', *Economic History Review* 6 (1935), 45–63.

¹⁶ D. Keene and V. Harding, *Historical Gazetteer of London before the Great Fire*, vol. 1, *Cheapside* (microfiche: Cambridge, 1987).

houses 11 inmates dwell'.¹⁷ Although the population was less densely packed than in the centre – perhaps 150 persons to the acre in the mid-seventeenth century – their conditions seem to have been very much worse. After the initial colonization of open spaces, further population increase was accommodated by subdivision and multi-occupancy, so that more people shared the same amount of floor space.

A good example of the way in which development took place is the infilling of the city ditch. The long stretches of land between the wall and the extramural roads of Houndsditch and Minories, which were open and used as tenter grounds and gardens in *c.* 1550, belonged to the Corporation, but were nevertheless let, in fairly large parcels, on leases that permitted building from the 1570s. Stow noted that the ditch 'of olde time was vsed to lie open' but that now it was enclosed and 'the banks thereof let out for Garden plots, Carpenters yarges, Bowling Allies, and diuerse houses thereon builded'.¹⁸ When these first leases fell in, from the 1590s and early 1600s, the area was let in smaller parcels, at higher rents. At first only the street frontage was built up but soon the yards and gardens behind were colonized and the ditch itself covered over; by the late seventeenth century the area was thickly covered with houses, a tight complex of leaseholds and subtenancies (fig. 3).¹⁹ The typical physical form of development in many of the inner suburbs was thus the close or alley, a narrow cul-de-sac leading off from the main street, giving access to several dwellings that may have been formed from the outbuildings of the original street-front house, and that at any rate occupied what was once its yard or garden. These small dwellings generally lacked any private open space, sharing only the semi-public area of the court. Many of the courts and closes that characterized the 'old suburbs' of the seventeenth-century city, and contained some of its worst housing, were probably developed in this way.²⁰ A survey of tithable rent values in the city in 1638 confirms this impression. It notes in most parishes the presence or absence of

¹⁷ PRO, SP16/359, fos. 92, 94. I am grateful to Derek Keene, Director, Centre for Metropolitan History, for allowing me to use his notes from this source and for a copy of his unpublished paper, 'The poor and their neighbours in seventeenth-century London'.

¹⁸ Stow, *Survey*, I.126.

¹⁹ CLRO, City Lands. A partial reconstruction of the development is in the archive notes of the Centre for Metropolitan History, Institute of Historical Research, University of London.

²⁰ Compare plates 26 (Houndsditch) and 46 (Pheasant Court, Smithfield) in John Schofield (ed.), *The London Surveys of Ralph Treswell* (1987).

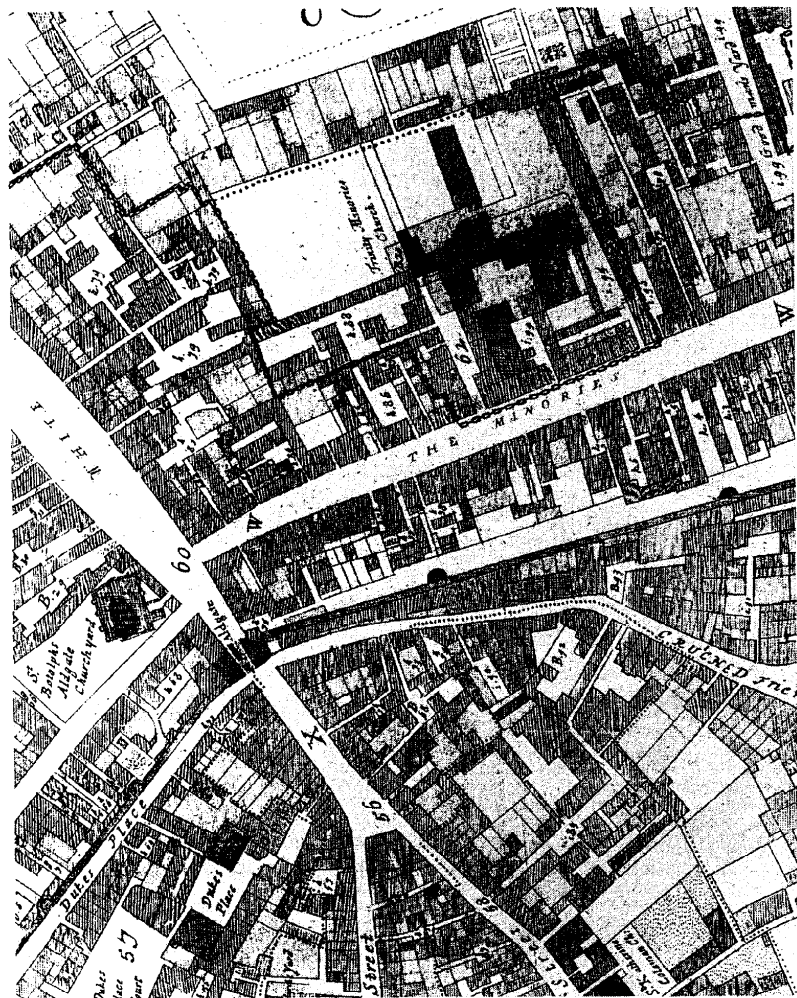


Fig. 3 A section from John Ogilby and William Morgan's 'Large and Accurate Map of the City of London' in c. 1676, showing Aldgate, the city wall, and the buildings between the Minories and the wall, infilling the waste space of the city ditch.

what were called rents or tenements, meaning not necessarily single divided buildings, but certainly groups of low-rent units under a single landlord. In the northern and eastern suburbs in particular the returns list numerous tenements, apparently whole alleys of units valued at £1 to £3 rent each. The extramural parish of St Botolph Aldgate contained properties such as Red Lyon Alley, with thirty or more tenements, valued at £60 per annum in all; sixteen tenements in 'Mr Green's rents', valued at £20; and 'Squirrel Alley rents', at £30.²¹ These clearly represent the kind of development pictured in fig. 3, and this information confirms their character as low-rent living areas.

It is also arguable that these new ways of accommodating the population militated against a sense of neighbourhood. The medieval streets of the city were narrow, but they formed an effective circulation network. Most houses opened onto major or minor streets rather than lanes and alleys, and there was a relatively free flow of contact and access. As indicated above, the expanded early modern population of the inner city found accommodation in divided houses, higher buildings, and the building-over of back plots; in the immediate fringe beyond the walls, development took the form of closes, narrow blind alleys onto which a dozen or more dwellings opened. In both cases the simple relationship between house and householder, and between house and street, was undermined. The texture of the built environment had become much more dense and congested, and it must have been very difficult to keep a clear sense of all the linked spaces of a neighbourhood. Equally, these new developments made it more difficult to perceive the human community, since the spatial obscurity of such dwellings also obscured the identity of their inhabitants. The tithe survey of 1638 lists thousands of householders by name, but the references to 'rents' or 'tenements' with a number of unnamed occupants suggest that in the eyes of the parish clergy, who returned the information, the occupants of such places had significantly less individuality.²² These alleys and closes might have their own social life and identity as a micro-neighbourhood, but they were clearly not fully assimilated into the larger parish to which they belonged. The Fire of 1666 obviously had an impact on the texture of the inner city, rebuilt with

²¹ T. C. Dale, *The Inhabitants of London in 1638* (1931), esp. pp. 211, 217.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 203–39.

wider streets and clearer building-lines and plot divisions, but it may have increased the overcrowding of the nearer suburbs, into which the dispossessed poured, leading to a still stronger contrast between an orderly centre and a disorderly and spatially incoherent inner ring of suburbs.

In addition to intensification of this kind, early modern growth extended the built-up area well beyond the city's medieval limits. It is important to note that, despite the proclamations and attempts to limit growth, there was no physical or jurisdictional barrier that confined development to within the city boundaries – unlike, for example, Edinburgh and Paris in the same period, where either fortifications or a strict limit on urban privileges meant that expansion of population had to be accommodated within existing boundaries and produced high-rise housing all over the city. What this meant in London, of course, was that the areas of new building were not so tightly constrained, and could afford to include gardens and open space, but also that they sprawled further.

Drawn and written surveys of London housing in the mid-seventeenth century show this graphically and reveal the contrast between east and west end development.²³ Overall, the new suburban growth was of mixed character; there was poor housing in both east and west ends, but very little substantial housing in the east. Towards Westminster especially, the new building included good-quality housing for gentry and government officials, as well as the great houses of nobles and court figures. Hollar's map of the Covent Garden area in c. 1658 (fig. 4) shows not only the extension of building since the mid-sixteenth century but also that many of the better houses had clearly been built with reasonably generous gardens. Houses in High Holborn (Staple Inn) were substantial, with up to ten rooms, and three-quarters of them had gardens. This kind of development contrasts with that in the east. Shadwell was a settlement almost entirely built up after 1600. There had been very little building here at all in the sixteenth century, but rapid growth especially from the 1620s and 1630s had by 1650 created a sizeable

²³ The principal study of this is M. J. Power, 'East and west in early-modern London', in E. W. Ives, R. J. Knecht, and J. J. Scarisbrick (eds.), *Wealth and Power in Tudor England. Essays Presented to S. T. Bindoff* (1978), pp. 167–85. See also N. G. Brett-James, *The Growth of Stuart London* (1935), esp. pp. 151–213, 366–419; L. Stone, 'Residential development of the west end of London in the seventeenth century', in B. C. Malament (ed.), *After the Reformation. Essays in Honor of J. H. Hexter* (Manchester, 1980), pp. 167–212; E. McKellar, *The Birth of Modern London. The Development and Design of the City, 1660–1720* (Manchester, 1999).

community of 3,500, as large as many provincial towns. This doubled again between 1650 and 1675 and continued upwards thereafter. The development was fairly low density, mostly consisting of small two-storey houses of up to four rooms, nearly half of them with gardens.²⁴

There was a big contrast between areas developed by or for landlords and those that spread relatively unchecked. The classic areas of imposed uniformity are of course the large-scale west-end developments, starting with Covent Garden in the 1630s and continuing in the rows of houses round Lincoln's Inn Fields and in St James's and other new squares. But this could also happen on less prestigious estates: under Shadwell's landlord, developers in the 1620s began by building groups of two or three houses, but rapidly moved on to building eight, ten, twelve, at once.²⁵ This developmental pattern was repeated in other new areas, giving, no doubt, something more of uniformity to their appearance and character than was the case in older-established areas where ownership was fragmented and development took place piecemeal. Where landlord control was weak, or local government control non-existent, the result could be chaotic. Tower Hill, the open space outside the Tower of London, was under the king's jurisdiction, not the city's, and hence presumably a place where civic regulations could be flouted. Nor does royal jurisdiction appear to have been exercised with vigour. Over 200 houses, mostly of poor quality, had been built on the open space here by 1649.²⁶ Open space in the early modern city could only survive if defined, claimed, and valued as such; unclaimed open space had no defence against encroachment.²⁷ Other exempt areas like the precinct of St Martin le Grand or the former royal property at Coldharbour on the Thames seem to have become notorious for poor housing, illicit trading, and unchecked crime.²⁸ One of the worst housing areas may have been New Palace Yard in

²⁴ Power, 'East and west'; M. J. Power, 'Shadwell, the development of a London suburban community in the seventeenth century', *London Journal* 4 (1978), 29–46; M. J. Power, 'East London housing in the seventeenth century', in P. Clark and P. Slack (eds.), *Crisis and Order in English Towns, 1500–1700* (1972), pp. 237–62.

²⁵ Power, 'Shadwell', 30–2.

²⁶ Power, 'East and west', p. 170.

²⁷ V. Harding, 'Gardens and open space in early modern London', in M. Galinou (ed.), *London's Pride: The Glorious History of the Capital's Gardens* (1990), pp. 44–55.

²⁸ V. Pearl, *London at the Outbreak of the Puritan Revolution* (Oxford, 1961), pp. 25–7, 32; J. L. McMullan, *The Canting Crew. London's Criminal Underworld, 1550–1700* (New Brunswick, 1984), p. 63.

Westminster, where, though rents were high (presumably because of its proximity to the court), houses were small and densely occupied, and the quality of the building was poor. Forty per cent of the houses were described *c.* 1650 as sheds, and they were largely timber-framed as opposed to the more fashionable and durable brick.²⁹

II SOCIAL TOPOGRAPHIES

Clearly, the growth of population and settlement of seventeenth-century London was producing a city of greater variation, stronger local characteristics, and social and environmental extremes. While the medieval mix of rich and poor was never wholly eliminated, and almost all areas continued to include dwellings, and inhabitants, of several different kinds, the expansion of early modern London led to a new social topography, and a clearer east/west and centre/suburbs opposition. This has been illustrated by mapping indices of wealth and poverty, health, and social structure across the capital.

The city-wide tithe assessment of 1638 indicates a marked gradient of desirability – if rent value can be taken as a proxy for this – from the city centre to the outlying areas. Both median rents and the proportion of high-value properties were generally highest in the city centre and lowest in the parishes bordering the city wall, both inside and outside. It is not a perfect concentric pattern, because the high-value centre was stretched out east–west along the main axis of the city, while there is some evidence for greater wealth in the western suburb than in the eastern.³⁰ A contemporary survey of divided and inmated houses also highlights the poverty of the nearer suburbs. Squirrel Alley rents, noted above, contained three aged couples who would work but ‘want the means to set themselves to work’ and one widower who would not work, with six children between them. Red Lyon Alley contained at least fourteen aged couples and two widows who would work but lacked the means, one aged widow, one man who could not work through age, four poor widows, and one man ‘very poor’, with twenty-six children between them.³¹ The Hearth Tax returns of the 1660s, as well as giving a sense of the size of

²⁹ Power, ‘East and west’, p. 170.

³⁰ E. Jones, ‘London in the early seventeenth century: an ecological approach’, *London Journal* 6 (1980), 123–34; R. Finlay, *Population and Metropolis. The Demography of London, 1580–1650* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 70–82.

³¹ *CSPD* (1637), pp. 178–83; PRO, SP16/359, fo. 90v.

houses in different areas of the city, also indicate how many households were exempted, on account of poverty, from paying the tax. In the city centre such non-chargeable households were few; in some of the western suburbs between 20 and 25 per cent of the households were not liable; in Shoreditch, Aldgate, and Shadwell the proportion was 50 per cent, and in Whitechapel 70 per cent of households did not pay the hearth tax.³² We can probably identify, therefore, scattered but not extreme poverty in the city centre; pockets of poverty in some suburbs, probably representing courts and alleys of small dwellings; and wide areas in some of the eastern suburbs where the majority of the population was poor. Not necessarily destitute, but poor.

We can also identify distinctive living patterns. A survey for the Privy Council in 1637 showed that multi-occupancy, defined in terms of divided houses and lodgers, was much higher in the periphery of the walled city and in the nearer suburbs, the first ring around the city centre, than in the centre itself. Within the walls, multi-occupancy was more likely to entail letting large houses as single rooms: in Silver Street, just within the wall, one house of ten rooms was occupied by '10 several families, divers of which also had lodgers'; in All Hallows the Less, by the river, another house contained eleven married couples, seven widows, and eight other single persons. Outside, 'divided houses' really meant the creation of numerous illicit residential units on the yard or garden of an older house, in the form of rents or alleys, as described above.³³ Later taxes suggest that in the city centre some 107 families were living in every 100 properties designated as single houses, while in the wards outside the walls at least 121 families were doing so.³⁴ The Parliamentary Surveys of c. 1650 show that both the shed dwellings of New Palace Yard and the much larger houses of Long Acre and Holborn were often occupied by more than one family, though values per room per annum (a plausible measure of demand) were actually highest in Westminster, despite the conditions. Few or none of the small houses in Shadwell, however, were occupied in this way.³⁵

³² M. J. Power, 'The social topography of Restoration London', in A. L. Beier and R. Finlay (eds.), *London 1500-1700: The Making of the Metropolis* (1986), pp. 199-223; Power, 'East and west', p. 181.

³³ *CSPD* (1637), p. 180; PRO, SP16/359.

³⁴ Jones and Judges, 'London population in the late seventeenth century', p. 53.

³⁵ Power, 'East and west', p. 170.

Another feature of seventeenth-century London is the range in family and household size. Apart from underlining the prevalence of the nuclear family in London as a whole – few extended families with resident kin – there was a distinct difference in the size of households in richer and poorer areas. In the city within the walls in 1695 the mean number of persons per household was 6.1; in the city without the walls the mean was 5.1. Further out the proportion falls further; the mean for villages and hamlets was, it is suggested, little more than 4 persons per household.³⁶ City-centre households were larger because they had more servants and apprentices, not necessarily more resident children, than those in the suburbs: obviously, a prosperous and independent craftsman or trader was in a position to take on the charge, and ultimately the benefit, of one or more apprentices, while the wage earner was not. Even moderately prosperous householders had female household servants, and some had several. Mean household size in some of the poorer areas of London was brought lower by the presence of numbers of widows living alone. They are to be found all over the city occupying single rooms and one-hearth dwellings, but in some areas like Aldgate they appear to have congregated, no doubt attracted by low rents and employment opportunities as landladies, nurses, and so on.³⁷

One of the significant ways in which the centre/suburbs relationship changed was in the perception of health and order. A simple contrast was made in people's minds between the prosperous, orderly, if densely packed, centre and the poorer and often unplanned and chaotic suburbs.³⁸ In so far as much of the new development strained urban services to the limits, this was justified. Water was piped to the richer areas of the town; the weakness of local government in the suburbs meant that street cleaning and environmental regulation were less effective there. The common perception was also justified by the geography of plague mortality,

³⁶ Jones and Judges, 'London population in the late seventeenth century', pp. 61–2; D. V. Glass, 'Gregory King's estimate of the population of England and Wales, 1695', in D. V. Glass and D. E. C. Eversley (eds.), *Population in History. Essays in Historical Demography* (1965), pp. 183–220.

³⁷ D. V. Glass (ed.), *London Inhabitants within the Walls, 1695* (London Record Society 2, 1966), pp. xxvi–xxvii, xxxiii; PRO, SP16/359, fos. 89–99. For widows and their work, see P. Earle, 'The female labour market in London in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries', *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, 42 (1989), 328–47.

³⁸ Aspects of this relationship are discussed in S. Mullancy, *The Place of the Stage. License, Play and Power in Renaissance England* (Chicago, 1988), though there is some confusion between suburbs and liberties.

which shifted from the city centre in the mid-sixteenth century to the outer suburbs in the mid-seventeenth and later. Paul Slack's influential study of plague, revealed a marked shift in its topography between the mid-sixteenth and the early seventeenth centuries. In 1563 the ten worst-affected city parishes all lay within the walls, and mostly towards the centre, where population was most dense. The ten parishes least affected (in terms of elevation beyond normal mortality levels) included some city-centre ones but also peripheral and waterfront parishes within the walls, and four of the large parishes outside the walls to east and west. By 1603, the least-affected parishes were those in the city centre, focusing on Cheapside, while the worst mortality occurred in pockets within the walls, including peripheral and waterfront parishes, and in some of the extramural parishes. By 1665, the polarization was complete: all the least-affected parishes clustered in the city centre, and all the worst-affected lay on the periphery of the city, just inside or outside the walls or on the waterfront.³⁹ While the exact dimensions of this particular shift may not have been apparent to contemporaries, the perception of the suburbs as particularly affected by plague was widespread, because of the currency of the Bills of Mortality. The Bills, listing the number dying weekly of plague and of all other causes, presented an image of London as a collection of parishes, arranged into the city within the walls, the sixteen parishes in the immediate suburbs, wholly or partly under the city's jurisdiction, the outparishes, and the distant parishes. The disparity between the numbers and sizes of parishes in each group exaggerated these distinctions, but without needing to make detailed calculations it was obvious that in the outer parishes the death-toll was extremely high. In 1665, according to the Yearly Bill, nearly 10,000 died of the plague within the walls, but nearly 30,000 in the sixteen parishes, and over 20,000 in the twelve outparishes. Nearly 5,000 died of plague in the parish of St Giles Cripplegate, to the north-west of the city wall, and 6,500 in Stepney parish in east London.⁴⁰ Contemporary and popular comment emphasizes how the Bills shaped percep-

³⁹ P. Slack, *The Impact of Plague in Tudor and Stuart England* (1985), pp. 151–64. For the distribution of mortality in 1665 see also J. A. I. Champion, *London's Dreaded Visitation: The Social Geography of the Great Plague in 1665* (Historical Geography Research Series, 31, 1995).

⁴⁰ In all, the Bill for 1665 notes 97,306 deaths, of which 68,596 were attributed to plague: *A Collection of the Yearly Bills of Mortality from 1657 to 1758 Inclusive* (1759); figures also available in Champion, *London's Dreaded Visitation*, pp. 104–7.

tions: they are a major theme of Defoe's account, supplying data for his authorial calculations, but also informing the characters in the narrative and motivating them to action.⁴¹ The Bills circulated widely in London, but were also sent to correspondents in the provinces or even abroad. People who had no personal knowledge of the capital were familiar with the names of parishes and with the varied social topography of London. As James Robertson emphasizes, the Bills must be seen as 'among the earliest and, arguably, among the most influential texts in shaping national views of London'.⁴²

III CHANGING PERCEPTIONS OF EXPERIENCED SPACES

In the context of changing perceptions of London as a space inhabited and experienced, the changed importance of formal boundaries within London become important. One boundary that never changed, within this period, and indeed for much longer, was that of the city. The city walls remained standing (though almost submerged by building in some places) and the gates were notable architectural features, but these were not jurisdictional boundaries: the city's irregular and historically contingent boundary encircled the walled city and a further ring of inner suburb. It was marked on the major roads by bars, more or less substantially constructed, at which there was at least at the start of the century still some attempt to take tolls (fig. 5). The boundary did not formally change, though, as has been noted, London's buildings spread far beyond it. In the sixteenth century, City government and Privy Council were reluctant to accept the reality and irreversibility of growth, and consequently slow to consider making changes to existing governmental structures and jurisdictional boundaries. By the time that the need for some response had become pressing, in the seventeenth century, relations between City and central government were seriously strained, and it was impossible to reach terms for an administrative and jurisdictional reorganization.⁴³ It remained a real boundary in administrative terms, with the area under the mayor and aldermen being more

⁴¹ Cf. N. E. McClure (ed.), *The Letters of John Chamberlain* (2 vols., Philadelphia, 1939), II, pp. 617, 618, 621, 622; Daniel Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1986).

⁴² James Robertson, 'Reckoning with London: interpreting the *Bills of Mortality* before John Graunt', *Urban History* 23 (1996), 325-50.

⁴³ Brett-James, *Growth of Stuart London*, pp. 223-47.

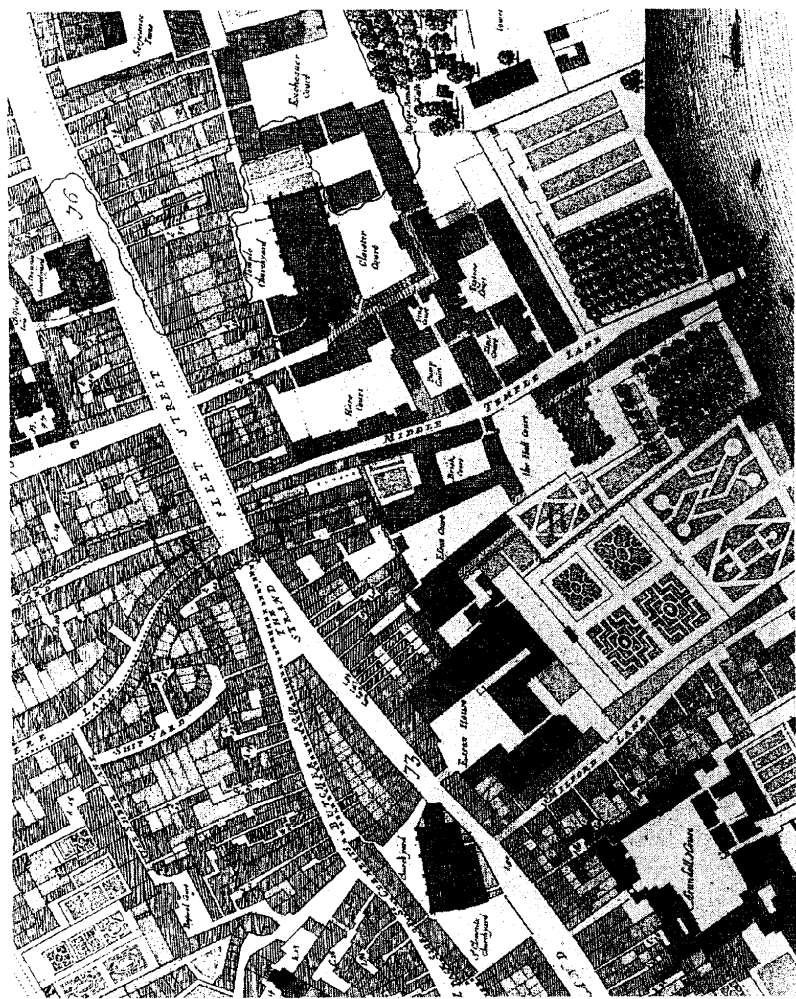


Fig. 5. A section from John Ogilby and William Morgan's map of London in c. 1676. Temple Bar, between the Strand and Fleet Street, stood at the limit of the city's jurisdiction (indicated on the map with a chain) but nowhere near the edge of the built-up area.

effectively governed, with far greater moral and financial resources, than the areas outside, which had a variety of *ad hoc* administrative arrangements. Thomas Freeman made a point of this contrast in 1614, when he characterized the city's spread as 'going to revel it in some disorder, Without the walls, without the liberties, Where she need fear nor Mayor nor Recorder'.⁴⁴ This is one of the important and enduring characteristics of early modern London. Local government, national taxes, ecclesiastical surveys, all respected the city boundary; historians have tended to do so too, since the surviving archival sources are structured by administrative divisions.⁴⁵ But there were other ways in which the sense of the boundary was weakening. Joseph Ward's recent book emphasizes a growing metropolitan consciousness, exemplified by the guilds' attempts to extend their exercise of regulatory powers to areas beyond the city's jurisdiction, and by the city magistrates' interference in the moral regulation of the suburbs.⁴⁶ By the end of the century the city's ruling elite no longer necessarily lived in the city. And as Defoe said, London 'in the modern acceptation' went far beyond the old boundaries.

Of the smaller divisions of the urban space, wards – within the city – were probably increasingly meaningless as experienced spaces, as the functions of the wardmote withered, though wards and precincts were still retained as sub-units of taxation.⁴⁷ Stow used the wards to structure his account of the city, even though this obscured some features of importance, such as Cheapside itself, which straddled three wards (this particular problem was remedied in the second edition of 1603).⁴⁸ Styrpe also, perforce, took wards as a unit of description, and this gained some added legitimation by the production of ward-maps, a notable feature of Styrpe's *Survey* and of later works on London.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Freeman, *Rubbe and a Great Cast* in Manley, *London in the Age of Shakespeare*, p. 250.

⁴⁵ V. Harding, 'From compact city to complex metropolis: records for the history of London, 1500–1720', in M. V. Roberts (ed.), *Archives and the Metropolis* (1998), pp. 83–92.

⁴⁶ J. P. Ward, *Metropolitan Communities. Trade Guilds, Identity, and Change in Early Modern London* (Stanford, 1997).

⁴⁷ V. Pearl, 'Change and stability in seventeenth-century London', *London Journal* 5 (1979), 25–7.

⁴⁸ Stow, *Survey*, lxxxviii, 264–9.

⁴⁹ J. J. Morrison, 'Styrpe's Stow: the 1720 edition of "A Survey of London"', *London Journal* 3 (1977), 40–54; C. M. Barron and V. Harding, 'London' in C. R. J. Currie and C. P. Lewis (eds.), *English County Histories, A Guide* (Stroud, 1994), pp. 260–1; R. Hyde, *Ward Maps of the City of London* (London Topographical Society Publication no. 154, 1999).

Parishes, however, had both less and more meaning in the seventeenth century. Certainly the traditional idea of the parish as a spiritual community that was spatially coextensive with a residential one had been undermined. The comprehensive and sufficient nature of parochial worship was a central principle of the Elizabethan settlement, yet within a century separatism and congregationalism were openly preached and practised. Only a handful of separatist and independent churches can be identified before the 1630s, but they represent a fundamentally different conception of the basis for church organization: the voluntary, 'gathered' congregation of saints, rather than the territorially organized parish.⁵⁰ The turmoil of the 1640s allowed many more divergent views on church organization to be voiced. A leading Independent of the time disparaged parish boundaries as 'that invisible line . . . drawn by the hand of blindness' in 'times of ignorance and superstition'.⁵¹ The 1650s saw a range of independent churches flourishing in London alongside a somewhat lame and incomplete parochial Presbyterian church.⁵² The post-Restoration settlement re-established the parochial, territorial church of England and effectively institutionalized the opposition between parochial and gathered church systems. The latter had another twenty-five years of fugitive and persecuted existence. After 1689, toleration restored the civil rights of non-conformists, but the new churches which they were then able to establish were seen as direct competitors to the Anglican church, and as before their congregations ignored parish boundaries.

The map of ecclesiastical parishes in the city of London was significantly changed in the later seventeenth century as a result of the Great Fire of 1666, in which eighty-four parish churches were burnt but only forty-nine of these subsequently rebuilt. The thirty-five parishes whose churches were not rebuilt (often, but not always, among the smallest in area and population) were united for ecclesiastical purposes with neighbouring parishes, and thereafter shared clergy, sacraments and services, and obligations.⁵³ The registers of these united parishes show the populations merged for baptism, marriage, and burial ceremonies; their theoretical congregations

⁵⁰ M. Tolmie, *The Triumph of the Saints: The Separate Churches of London, 1616-49* (Cambridge, 1977).

⁵¹ John Goodwin, 1645, cited in Tolmie, *Triumph of the Saints*, p. 100.

⁵² Tai Liu, *Puritan London: A Study of Religion and Society in the City Parishes* (1986).

⁵³ W. G. Bell, *The Great Fire of London* (1920), pp. 299-312, 334-7.

now averaged over 1,000, though there was clearly no expectation, by now, that all would attend. Another important point here is that the suburban parishes were always very much larger in acreage than the city centre ones, and as the major location of new population settlement they became very populous. Several were each as large and populous as a significant provincial town. The parishes that ringed the city walls by 1700 each contained populations of from 2,500 to well over 10,000. Parishes that had been largely open and cultivated land in 1550, such as St Martin-in-the-Fields, now had populations in the tens of thousands. The huge parish of Stepney, which comprised most of east London, had had one smaller parish carved out of it before 1700 but still its population had grown from less than 2,000 to over 40,000 in 1700.⁵⁴ For most seventeenth-century Londoners, then, the parish was no longer self-evidently a neighbourhood, an intimate community easily apprehended as a spatial environment and offering personal and direct human contact with fellow-parishioners.

However, parishes gained more meaning from other functions, and indeed in the suburbs it was these functions that constructed the local community and the beginnings of local administration. Parishes were taken over as the basic unit of resource and responsibility for the administration of the Elizabethan Poor Law, and in the long term, the exercise of these powers established the parish as the effective unit of local government and helped to regenerate the parish as a focus for local identity. The Poor Law emphasized the identity of the parishioner as participant (whether benefactor or beneficiary) in a process of redistribution; in some sense it made the parish a miniature commonwealth, by establishing the wealth of richer parishioners as a resource available to support the poorer. It helped to mark the distinction between the local resident poor and the passing stranger in need of relief. Parish poor and parish pensioners, especially when identified by badging, were the visible manifestation of the community's care for its members. There was a very strong territorial aspect to all this. Each parish had its own poor, its own problems, its own resources, its own level of charge, and the criterion for both liability and eligibility was the exact place

⁵⁴ These figures are based on communicants in 1548 and on numbers of deaths in c. 1700: see C. Kitching, *The London and Middlesex Chantry Certificate of 1548* (London Record Society, 16, 1980); *A Collection of the Yearly Bills of Mortality from 1657 to 1758 Inclusive*, and Harding, 'The population of London', for multipliers and methods of calculation.

of residence. The parish boundary marks that now appear as a quaint survival on city buildings once had a real significance for local residents. The Act of Settlement of 1662 reinforced the identification of individuals with parishes, by basing eligibility for relief on place of 'settlement' – normally the place of birth. In a geographically mobile society, individuals carried with them through life their certificates of settlement, and their identity as members of another parish, unless they could 'gain a settlement' elsewhere through employment or tenancy.⁵⁵

IV INDIVIDUAL ITINERARIES

Clearly, no seventeenth-century Londoner could know the whole metropolis, and the worlds of city, east end, and west end were diverging in character and culture. Stow's *Survey* was written at about the last date that it was possible to do so comprehensively and reasonably succinctly. He could indeed survey London with authority and personal knowledge of most of its parts. But as the capital spread, few people can have had the need or the desire to comprehend it all. An infinite number of individually imagined cities must have existed. To find their way around, Londoners must have relied on a mixture of accumulated personal experience and transmitted information and directions. The later seventeenth century saw the appearance of street and trade directories and also of readable maps, whether for the whole metropolis or for wards and parishes.⁵⁶

Only rarely can we trace an individual's mental map of the city. Nehemiah Wallington offers one example, of a man who moved hardly at all as far as residence went, but who had contacts and connections across and outside the city. He was born and brought up in the parish of St Leonard Eastcheap, apprenticed to his own father, and settled on marriage in the next parish before moving back to St Leonard's; he also had a large number of kin resident nearby.⁵⁷ He clearly traversed the city itself, and his business and other occasions took him to Southwark, Westminster, Blackheath, Romford, and Ipswich.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ P. Slack, *The English Poor Law, 1531–1782* (1990), esp. pp. 26–9, 35–9, 61–2.

⁵⁶ P. Atkins, *The Directories of London, 1677–1977* (1990). More generally, see L. Picard, *Restoration London* (1997); C. Wall, *The Literary and Cultural Spaces of Restoration London* (Cambridge, 1998).

⁵⁷ P. S. Seaver, *Wallington's World. A Puritan Artisan in Seventeenth-Century London* (1985), pp. 69–73, 77.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 58, 97–8, 150–1.

His close connections within and outside London, however, were shaped by his membership of the godly community, which brought him distant contacts (extending to the nearby continent and to North America) but perhaps limited the number of geographically proximate neighbours with whom he was prepared to engage.⁵⁹ The sophisticated Pepys, on the other hand, who came to London as a young man, travelled constantly for business and pleasure between the court and government at Westminster, his home in Mincing Lane, and places downriver at Deptford and Greenwich. Extremely familiar with the fashionable west end, his excursions there were motivated by tastes and desires that would have been alien and deeply shocking to Wallington.⁶⁰ Another, less well-known Londoner was Richard Smyth (d. 1675), who kept an obituary list of his acquaintance in London which allows us to trace his path through the city and reconstruct the geographical, as well as the social and affective, world to which he belonged. Smyth was in a good position to know several parts of London well: as a city law-officer living in Old Jewry, he linked the courts at Guildhall and the Poultry and Wood Street Compters with the legal world of the Inns of Court and with the central Law Courts at Westminster. Once retired to Moorfields, he had leisure to pursue his book-collecting, and indeed was 'constantly known every day to walk his rounds through the shops', though he also had a network of more local friends, acquaintances, and neighbours (fig. 6).⁶¹ Each of these men, however, was only one Londoner among several hundred thousand; undoubtedly others, whether from the prosperous professional and mercantile middle classes or the unsettled and mobile poor, would have had equally idiosyncratic circuits. New foci of activity in the later seventeenth century would have included the coffee houses of Lombard Street near the Royal Exchange, as well as the retail centres and entertainment venues of the west end and the offices of government frequented by Pepys. Women, including Elisabeth Pepys, moved differently round the city and between certain spaces and poles.⁶²

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

⁶⁰ R. Latham and W. Matthews (eds.), *The Diary of Samuel Pepys* (11 vols., 1970–83).

⁶¹ V. Harding, 'Mortality and the mental map of London: Richard Smyth's *Obituary*', in R. Myers and M. Harris (eds.), *Medicine, Mortality and the Book Trade* (Folkestone, 1998), pp. 49–71.

⁶² Cf. e.g. Peter Earle, *A City Full of People* (1994), pp. 107–55.



Fig. 6 A section from William Faithorne's 'An Exact Delineation of the Cities of London and Westminster and the Suburbs' of 1658. Richard Smyth lived first in Old Jewry (near 87, bottom centre) and later on the west side of Moorfields (centre), a quite separate neighbourhood, though not more than a few hundred yards away.

There is clearly no possibility of mapping more than a few of these personal itineraries, or of closely relating them to the broader characterizations of London localities made earlier. I will only conclude, therefore, by reiterating the initial analogy between the texts of Stow and Strype and the London they described: compact, integrated, comprehensible, as opposed to extended, amorphous, inadequately underpinned by formal structure. Their attitudes to London contrasted too. Stow saw London as essentially a unity, a concentric city whose history formed a single coherent narrative, though he was uncomfortably aware of the disruptive potential of contemporary forces of change. Strype found his London project almost unmanageably difficult in technical terms, and could not satisfactorily resolve the problem of relating the parts to the whole. In attempting to respect the structure of the original, he accepted a programme not best suited to the London of his day. His difficulties, however, are a reflection of the increasingly complex character of early modern London, incredibly rich and diverse, but beyond comprehension even by contemporaries.